

JESUS WAS A HEALER: STILL IS

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27; Mark 5:21-43

A sermon preached by the Reverend Theodore S. Atkinson
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“Do not fear, only believe.” Mark 5:36

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I love the healing stories of Jesus, both the Bible stories and the stories that we hear today of the healing power of Jesus. They remind us that the way things are - where disease and illness rob parents and spouses of their dreams - is not the way they're supposed to be or shall be. The healing stories remind us that sickness and death will not have the final word. God is going to win in the end.

The story we heard this morning is a double feature story -- an older woman healed and a little girl is raised from the dead. The woman had suffered twelve years, as many years as the little girl had lived. ~~She suffered from an irregular menstrual flow, an embarrassing medical~~ problem that made her religiously as well as physically unclean. In other words, her irregular flow kept her from worshipping in the synagogue. The rulers of the synagogue wouldn't let her in. “She's unclean!” they'd say. For twelve years she'd been unable to worship with God's people. ^{Physical illness often has spiritual implications} But Jesus healed the woman and went on to raise the little girl from the dead.

Now women and young girls, pay close attention to what I'm about to say. Mark put this double feature story in his Gospel to tell us how much Jesus -- how much God -- loves *you*. God loves *everybody* but throughout the centuries some people have felt overlooked by God. Whole groups of people have wondered if God really loves them. In particular, women, old and young, have been overlooked. Philosophers discussed whether women are really human. The Biblical writers sometimes don't count women and children. Remember when Jesus fed the 4000 in the wilderness -- the biblical writers say, “That doesn't count the women and children.” Women and

children often weren't counted. Women still lag behind men when it comes to equal pay for equal work. Women and children still suffer disproportionately. Thousands of women in the U.S. have no health care insurance – in greater proportions than men. They can't afford it. Their employers don't or can't offer health care benefits. In the United States 2,400 children are born into poverty each day, 100,000 children are homeless each night, 27 children die of poverty each day, ~~night~~. Mark put the double feature story of the healing of the woman and the resurrection of the little girl in his Gospel to tell us how much God, in Christ, loves women, young and old.

Mark emphasizes Christ's tender love for women and children by telling us that Jesus allowed himself to come into physical contact with a bleeding woman and a dead girl. Bleeding women and dead little girls were both taboo in Judaism. By having anything to do with either one of them, Jesus rendered himself unclean. When the bleeding woman touched Jesus she was healed -- but Jesus became ritually unclean. According to Jewish law Jesus should have gone off immediately to purify himself. "Until he did, he was contagious and unfit" to minister to others. But Jesus didn't go off to purify himself. He kept on going to the home of the little girl.

But Jesus came too late. Sometimes we get what we want when we pray. We pray for healing and we get the miracle of healing. But sometimes we don't get the healing we pray for and it's not a matter of lack of faith. We pray for healing and a loved one dies. The older woman was healed but the little girl died. Jesus got there too late. Jesus did not heal the little girl. The little girl died. "The most likely interpretation of the words 'The child is not dead but asleep' (39), is not that she was in a coma... but that if, as reported, she was dead, then it was like sleep for he was on his way to raise her up." (Donald English) Isn't that what happens so often when we pray. We pray for the miracle of healing and it doesn't happen.

But the story doesn't end with the death of the little girl. Jesus approached her bed and took her hand. He raised her from the dead. He didn't heal her. He raised her from the dead. Jesus sometimes miraculously heals in answer to our prayers. But most people don't get the miracle of healing. The Rev. Dr. James Montgomery Boice, pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for thirty-two years, died two weeks ago at the age of 61. He was diagnosed with liver cancer on Good Friday and began treatment almost immediately but the cancer was so aggressive that he died about a month later.

People asked Rev. Boice if they should pray for a miracle. He responded, "Well, you're free to do that, of course. My general impression is that the God who is able to do miracles—and He certainly can—is also able to keep you from getting the problem in the first place. So although miracles do happen, they're rare by definition. A miracle has to be an unusual thing. I think it's far more profitable to pray for wisdom for the doctors. Doctors have a great deal of experience, of course, in their expertise, but they're not omniscient—they do make mistakes—and then also for the effectiveness of the treatment. Sometimes it does very well and sometimes not so well, and that's certainly a legitimate thing to pray for. Above all, I would say pray for the glory of God. If you think of God glorifying Himself in history and you say, where in all of history has God most glorified Himself? He did it at the cross of Jesus Christ, and it wasn't by delivering Jesus from the cross, though He could have.... And yet that's where God is most glorified." Boice went on to make two theological observations on his illness. First, God is in charge and will win in the end. Secondly, God is good.

Jesus was a healer. He still is. But even healed people eventually die. The woman was healed by Jesus but she eventually died. What is more wonderful than the fact that Jesus is a healer is that Jesus raises the dead. Jesus did not heal the daughter of Jairus. He raised her from

the dead. Father Robert Capon has said, "Jesus came to raise the dead. The only qualification for the gift of the Gospel is to be dead. You don't have to be smart. You don't have to be good. You don't have to be wise. You don't have to be wonderful. You don't have to be anything... you just have to be dead. That's it."

The high point in our Gospel lesson is not when Jesus healed the woman. The high point is not even when Jesus raised the dead little girl. The high point -- and the most crucial point for us is when Jesus said to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." If Jairus was able to do that, if we're able to do that, when we've been told our loved one has died -- we'll be ready for whatever happens. We will praise God when Jesus heals us. And we will not fear but believe the promise of God when our loved ones died. Because Jesus has come to raise the dead.

I hope all of us pray for miracles. I hope we experience miracles of healing. I hope we take careful notice of the miracles that come our way every day. But whatever happens, whether sickness or health, life or death, we belong to God and God is going to win in the end. Christ will raise us from the dust. Jesus is our hope and trust.

Let us pray: By your power, great God, our Lord Jesus healed the sick and gave new hope to the hopeless. Though we cannot command or possess your power, we pray for those who want to be healed. Mend their wounds, soothe fevered brows, and make broken people whole again. Help us to welcome every healing as a sign that, though death is against us, you are for us, and have promised renewed and risen life in Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.